

31 December 1975

Dear Mr. Pawley:

Herewith the article I promised you by David Eisenhower. I hope to be in Florida around the 9th of January for a week and will be in touch with you then.

Again, many many thanks for that absolutely magnificent box of fruit which I am still enjoying every day.

With every good wish to Mrs. Pawley, Anita and yourself for the new year.

As ever,

Vernon A. Walters
Lieutenant General, USA

Mr. William D. Pawley

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4 December 1975

The White House Killers

BY DAVID EISENHOWER

Ordinarily, when you come up against the Kennedy legend and lose, you shrug it off. It rarely occurs to anyone that in such a contest he might win. But when allegations of murder are thrown all over the political lot except at the very people who are most likely to have been implicated with it, it may be worth at least a try at overcoming the invincibility of that Kennedy ethos.

In real terms, this problem comes up as a result of the recent report of Sen. Frank Church's Intelligence Committee. To put the matter as starkly as possible, and also as truthfully as possible, where there is the best evidence that a President of the United States might have known about and sanctioned assassination attempts, the President in question is absolved. Where the evidence is weakest and most attenuated that Presidents were involved, the Church committee uses the strongest language with the most sinister implications. It is unmistakably obvious that the former President is John F. Kennedy and the latter are Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon.

'Straightforward Activity'

To take the cases in chronological order, President Eisenhower is accused of involvement in plans to assassinate Patrice Lumumba, a pro-Soviet leader in the Congo before and shortly after its independence from Belgium. The extent of the involvement is that at a meeting of the National Security Council, President Eisenhower is said to have expressed the wish for "straightforward activity" against Lumumba. This recollection comes from one uncorroborated witness. At least three other witnesses of the same meeting did not recall any such order.

A day later, Director of the CIA Allen Dulles is reported to have authorized an attempt on Lumumba, resulting in the transmission of various guns and poisons to the Congo. Six months later, Lumumba died in the hands of his Congolese captors—his death unrelated to a CIA plot, according to the Senate committee itself. On the basis of the one "straightforward activity" remark, the committee draws the "inference" that President Eisenhower authorized an assassination.

On the other hand, the Kennedy brothers are held by the committee to have been unaware of the repeated murder efforts in the Caribbean on the following evidence: There were repeated presidential-level discussions of the Kennedys' displeasure with Castro. As in the Eisenhower-Lumumba case, Sen. Church found references to suggestions for "straightforward activity" against Castro.

However, in what seems to some ears to be stronger language, those discussions also included references to "disposing of Castro." CIA director John McCone recalls that discussions with the Kennedys were even drawn in terms of "mocking

off Castro." CIA aide Richard Bissell recalls that President Kennedy ordered the CIA to "get off its ass" against Castro.

Further, within three weeks of JFK's inauguration, his national security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, was briefed on the development of an "assassination capability" within the CIA. Mr. Bundy supposedly did not order it stopped nor, supposedly, did he tell President Kennedy. Robert Kennedy was informed at least twice about Mafia connections with attempts to kill Castro, without disavowing either and, supposedly, without telling his brother, the President, about them. Robert Kennedy is, in fact, frequently portrayed by the Church com-

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mittee as misled by the nature and extent of CIA activities, a proposition which Tom Braden, a Washington columnist with close Kennedy associations and a former Office of Strategic Services man himself, thinks is "impossible to imagine."

All of this activity, the Church committee concludes, shows only that President Kennedy was interested in some kind of "broad strategy" to bring about Cuban democracy.

Moving right along, despite a mountain of evidence of Kennedy displeasure with the Ngo Dinh Diem regime and undoubted U.S. involvement in the coup against him and his brother Nhu, the Church committee finds the Kennedys absolved because the murders of Diem and Nhu were "spontaneous acts." The assassination of General Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, though plotted with the knowledge of American "personnel" (read "the President, John F. Kennedy") is construed by Church's group as defiance of Kennedy's written statement that assassination is wrong (though not so wrong as to prevent U.S. recognition of Trujillo's assassins should they succeed.)

When the report comes to Richard Nixon, Sen. Church's committee finds "inferences" that President Nixon gave carte blanche to the CIA to kill whoever necessary to keep Allende from power in Chile, and therefore Mr. Nixon should be responsible for the death of General Rene Schneider. General Schneider had been a target for CIA kidnapping, but died in a non-CIA connected kidnapping.

The Church committee is thus giving us more than a double standard. It is saying that where there is clear evidence of re-

sponsibility (the Kennedy cases), even clearer evidence of responsibility is needed to establish an "inference." Where there is extremely vague evidence of responsibility (the Eisenhower and Nixon cases), no more than vague hints are needed.

As I said at the outset, people are used to less than equity when dealing with the Kennedy legend. And, in recent years, politicians have gotten used to throwing around "inferences" pretty casually. But the Church committee's action is a deadly combination of the two. Even when protecting the Kennedys, it is not a laughing matter to throw out inferences of murder into a public forum where the distinctions between "inferences" and facts get blurred. In other words, even to spare the feelings of the Kennedy fans, you should treat accusations of murder similarly in similar cases.

That's what the law is supposed to be about—treating similarly situated people similarly. And respect for the law and for American ideals is supposed to be the reason why the Church committee is washing so much dirty laundry in public. We have to have an open society, reasons Sen. Church, so let it all out, no matter how bad it looks.

Less Than Meets the Eye?

There are a couple of problems with this posture. One is that we may be letting stuff out that is worse than what really happens. In other words, in the cases of all three Presidents, there is apparently less going on than meets an eye scanning the Church report. A report from an American Senate committee accusing Americans of plotting murder is one thing if it is solidly based. It becomes quite another thing, something more like the most irresponsible kind of partisanship if it is a device aimed at one party by another, using only the most flimsy evidence.

And what good will the report do? We know it has demoralized the CIA. What we cannot know is how foreigners will react to our self-flagellation. Senator Church thinks they will respect our candor. I cannot help but think that this is akin to thinking a rapist will be admired for confessing.

Beyond a few vague pieties about not assassinating people, hedged with more vague words about not barring covert activities, the Church report offers no guidance about how the CIA should be conducting itself, which, after all, is supposed to be the main product of the Church committee. Perhaps that will come with the committee's final report in a few months. In the meantime, is any broader purpose than publicity for politicians being served? It's hard to see what that might be.

Assassination. Just the sound of the word makes one's skin crawl. The committee report calls it "a coldblooded, targeted intentional killing of a political leader." Don't we need far more tangible, convincing proof before we even begin to make such grave charges against Presidents Kennedy or Nixon or my grandfather?